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ABC Report Cites Doubts About Testimony by Agca

Reuter

NEW YORK, May 12—A four-month ABC News investigation broadcast tonight cast doubt on allegations that the shooting of Pope John Paul II was part of a Soviet-Bulgarian conspiracy.

The report said testimony by the pope's would-be assassin, Mehmet Ali Agca, linking Bulgarians to the conspiracy, had discrepancies.

ABC also said that what has been offered as a possible reason for Soviet-Bulgarian involvement—a strongly worded letter on Poland from the pope to the late Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev—in fact was never written.

The network said Agca claims to have spoken with the Bulgarians in English, but his English was poor and the Bulgarians say they cannot speak the language. ABC also quoted high Vatican sources as saying the pope was convinced there was a Soviet-Bulgarian plot against him, although he thought it never would be proved.

ABC quoted Vatican sources and Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia as saying the Polish-born pontiff never wrote a letter in Russian to Brezhnev threatening that if there was a Soviet invasion of Poland, he would lay down the crown of St. Peter and return to Poland.

"Not only was there not such a letter, but such a letter directly from the pope to Brezhnev would have been a total departure from normal procedure. No way could you conceive of the Holy Father saying 'I would resign,' " Krol said.

ABC, quoting high Vatican sources, said there was a spoken message delivered to Soviet officials from the pope in which he offered to mediate and urged caution on both sides.